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Picture of Everyday Creativity in the Narrative Perspective – Analysis of a Case

Abstract

The subject of the theoretical reflection and the empirical research of the presented paper is a category of everyday creativity. The research focused on the influence of subjective and social factors on undertaking creative and innovative actions by students. Special attention was paid to the environment of everyday creativity, perceiving it as a space for growth, development and stimulation of the student's everyday creativity. The presented paper is an attempt at practical use of a narrative inquiry in research on creativity, precisely the conditions and specific nature of everyday creativity.

Key words: *creativity pedagogy, everyday creativity, peer group, domestic and educational environment.*

Introduction

The researchers who defined writings on the social science ground emphasise various aspects connected with this term, which may often cause inconsistencies. It happens because the writings appeared in the subject literature not only in the context of material products, but also as a “specific manner of being, of referring to relations with the environment, which is an attitude heading for modification of “which is”, providing a human being with individualization and ipso facto self-realization” (Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2009). An implication of the above in the contemporary psychology and pedagogy is represented in writings about the dualistic approach to the phenomenon of writing itself. The first approach,

called elite, treats it as a unique characteristic typical of not numerous prominent creators. Its products are estimated from the point of view of the novelty, originality and value of a given work. The second approach, egalitarian, understands creation as the characteristics of behaviour, the expression of self-realization. It might be manifested in everyday common activities and it does not have to take on sophisticated and exclusive forms. According to Modrzejewska-Świgulska (2009), in the egalitarian perspective creation is attributed to every human being, it is accomplished in the personal dimension, functioning as a manifestation of self-realization. What is important, understanding of egalitarian works goes beyond the artistic frames.

An immediate source of the everyday creativity categories are undoubtedly the theories of creativity, popularized and developed by humanistic psychologists, Polish pedagogues of creativity and psychologists of abilities. And even though the views of the above-mentioned representatives of different scientific disciplines arose in diverse, often distinct social orders, they all express a common notion of the creative potential of an individual, which may be activated in all kinds of everyday situations related to spare time, time spent with family or devoted to professional development (Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2009).

According to the author, particular attention should be paid to the views of Ruth Richards, Mark Runco and Anna Craft. The limited size of this article does not allow for a detailed description of the content of their works and theories, therefore attention is focused on the prime elements and common features. (cf. Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2009a, Szmidt, 2009a).

In her conception of *everyday creativity*, Ruth Richards emphasises that “everyday creativity specifies a creative person, a process and a result, which can be a particular work or activity that occurs every day in the occupational sphere, during free time and home duties” (Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2009: 158 in Richards 1999).

Creativity in Richards’s point of view is therefore treated as a style of action, a characteristic feature of life, and also as an internal power which lets us adjust to the rapid changes of the surrounding reality of life.

Mark Runco has popularised the egalitarian approach to creativity by developing the conception of *personal creativity*. According to this conception, we all are capable of creative behaviours and have a creative capability, which is understood by the author as building new, original interpretations of our own experiences and it is permanently embedded in human nature (Szmidt 2009a).

On the other hand, A. Craft, the author of the conception of *creativity with a small “c”*, treats creativity as “a disposition to a conscious life planning, making decisions and choices which bring us closer to our individual aims”. What is crucial,

Craft emphasises that the idea of creativity, especially in education, should not be limited just to teaching artistic subjects – there is a need to notice people's everyday action as well (Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2009a: 52).

Summarizing, we can acknowledge that for the presented positions there is a characteristic assumption that everybody can be creative, although not to the same extent. What is crucial, the authors of the conception stress a significant role of the family and school environment on the development of everyday creativity.

Social and environmental conditioning of daily creativity

According to K., J. Szmidt (2001), creativity is a continuous quality that involves the need for development; merging into social groups and into cultural values; it constitutes a potential opportunity that reveals itself and flourishes in a propitious educational environment, it involves action essential in solving every-day problems.

The social conditions for creativity should be examined in the context of the adopted paradigm. In system concepts social environment is regarded as a basic element of the system of creativity where creative activities always occur in specified conditions and in a specified situational context, in a scope determined by environmental influences (Florczykiewicz, 2008).

It is worth noticing that also in the suggested interactive models of creativity the role of social and contextual factors triggering the chance of creative action is stressed. Among the contextual influences the physical environment of an individual was mentioned, the culture of the group/organization that the individual is in, the climate and the restrictions and the obstacles for creative activities (Karwowski, 2009a).

Roberta Milgram's conceptual model of giftedness indicates the extension of the range of external conditions of the development of giftedness. Among the factors that influence the functioning of gifted people, the author listed some external factors (culture, society) and some individual factors (subculture, school, home, socio-economic status), but also age, sex, personality, and learning styles (Karwowski, 2009a).

Except for inborn features, some external factors and mechanisms from various environments influence the individual's life. One of them is, undoubtedly, the education environment. It determines the direction of the personality's development and human virtues ideals, aspirations or values (Przetacznik-Gierowska, Włodarski, 1994). However, the influence of home is not limited only to primary socialization

or to the transfer of the most important values, but it also allows transfer of the specific, often concrete functions connected with creativity (Karwowski 2009a). Although research on the domestic conditions of creativity is often interchangeable, it indicates that the role of the upbringing style or the hierarchy of values established in the family is crucial in generating the creative attitude of the individual.

Research Methodology

After considering the above-mentioned theory, the author chooses K.J. Szmidt's point of view, who understands creation as *"an activity which is making products (works of art, outlooks, methods, actions, etc.), is innovative and possesses its own value (esthetical, cognition, ethical use value, or others) at least for the creating subject"* (Szmidt, 2007, p. 67). The choice of this definition allows to imply in its range not only physical objects and ideas acknowledged by the range of receivers, but also authentic individual everyday activities (e.g., amateur creativity, dealing with everyday problems) made in individual life environment (Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2009).

The main research purpose was the analysis of and reflection about all signs of everyday creation. Also, personal and social aspects were taken into consideration during the research on creative and innovative activities by high school students.

Methods and Techniques Applied to Personal Research

The wide range of research questions applied in the pedagogy of creativity demands an equally widely understood methodological attitude to answer them in an empirical manner (Galewska-Kustra, 2009). The author of this article is aware that the researchers of creativity view the recognition of complementarity of the quantitative and qualitative attitudes. She postulates using qualitative oriental knowledge for research on common creativity pointing its validity. It results in the choice of a biographic method and within its range a technique of narrative interview, which was treated as an immediate medium to 'the experience' of the examined (Silvermann, 2008).

The data obtained by the narrative interview are not exhaustive and can be treated as a certain stage in using qualitative methods but they provide a general image of common creativity of the examined.

The description of subjects and the course of research

Five people participated in the research. They were girls at the age of sixteen to eighteen. The research carried out was of the pilot character and it is an introductory stage which is carried out before the actual research on the issue of everyday creation. The research will be continued on an enlarged group of people.

The selection of the subjects was an intentional act because, according to Silvermann (2008), the intentional act of choosing a sample allows the researcher to choose a case for the sake of the fact that it reflects a particular quality or process that is the area of interest. The chosen subject was pointed out by the headmaster and by the school pedagogue because these people have a vast knowledge of the interest field of the examined students, their affiliation with different kinds of organizations, interest groups or their participation in tests and contests in particular subjects.

The subjects were carefully selected on the basis of their ability to build a story out of which the gauge of variables could be read. The examinations proceeded at three stages. In the first part of the narrative survey every subject was supposed to spontaneously present his/her life in the form of a story.

In the second part of the survey the subjects were asked additional questions, and the respondents were requested to extend their story by issues helping the subjects in completing all the missing information.

In the third part of the survey (in the so-called *balancing phase*) the subjects answered additional questions, important from the survey author's point of view, e.g., *Do you consider your life as filled with creative activities?* The narrators were also able to add commentaries to their narration.

Presentation of research results

From the bibliographical perspective, creativity refers also to the entire life of an individual. In the research carried out, it is considered as an important aspect of everyday actions of the person, their education, relations with family and peer groups, and hence it was important to reveal everyday creativity in the context as broad as possible and also to refer to the environmental functioning of the respondents.

As M. Karwowski (2009) states, since the late 1950s, the most organizing distinction of both theoretical and research analyses in the issues addressing creativity, seems to be the so-called fourth paradigm model.

In accordance with that approach, creativity may be analysed as: *product* (attributive aspect); *psychological process* (process aspect); *creator* (personal aspect); *outside conditions which determine the process of creating* (stimulant-inhibitor aspect), (Szmidt, 2007).

Referring to the above-mentioned distinction in the research which was taken into account there were: *the products* of everyday creativity; *processes* which lead respondents to products or to the realization of everyday creativity of the *creator*; *conditions*, which were favourable or unfavourable for the respondents in their everyday creativity.

On the basis of the above-mentioned information, separate categories of the data analysis were created, and then, relying on these categories, it was possible to put forward the most essential thematic threads in the biographies of the subjected narrators. The categories were chosen suitably for the content of the narrations, in which the fulfillment of the daily artist in the particular field was considered.

It was assumed that the subject possesses some specific, expressed by means of daily work, features, preferences and capabilities, which will be manifested in different fields, like: interests, behaviour, values, emotions, motivation, interpersonal relations. During the analysis of the daily work, collecting the information about the ways of the work realization by the subjects was crucial. Their answers were treated as a form of internal experience (feelings, meanings). The aim of the applied analysis is access to the description of the realization of the daily work by the subjects along with the context (profiles of the daily artists), and also the attempt at comparison of the cases, paying special attention to differences and similarities among the narrators. (See also: Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2009).

The profile of an examined person – exemplary analysis

Not enough space makes it impossible to present exact results of the interviews. Therefore, part of the narration of one of the five examined persons is going to be included here.

Narrative portrait. Biographical sketch – Julia, 17 years old. She is a student of the first grade of secondary school. She is interested in science fiction literature, Manga, Anime, Weird Fantasy and also demonology and angiology. She draws Manga comics. She is doing a course of writing a fantasy book and she dreams of publishing it. Julia participates in art contests; she receives awards. She runs her own website. In the future she would like to study medicine; more precisely she wants to become a specialist in neurology.

The information received as a result of the study is presented according to four main analytical categories resulting directly from the research problems included in theoretical premises.

I. The process of creation and its reconstruction

Kinds of daily activity

A detailed description concerning the creative process and its course appeared at the first stage of the interview. It was essential to concentrate on the process of creating new works valuable for the examined person and the stages of this process. How long the examined person deals with a given activity and what kind of emotions accompany were also taken into account.

Since I remember I have worked persistently; I work hard, almost every day. Especially, I work on the painting perspective. When I write I try not to give up. Usually, I show it to other people to correct. I don't add anything new without previous check. When I read or see something, I receive the influx of creative energy, then I sit down and work. Recently, after having read a book, I made around 2000 drafts.

In the reconstruction of the course of the work concerning the creative problem, the author emphasises the great role of creativity, presents also different stages and phases

I have something like flashes of she – inspiration, but as a matter of fact it's he – inspiration, because I cannot believe that something female could be so mean. It causes me a lot of terrible problems and 'he' attacks me, e.g., during a maths test, when I was tempted to draw on the margin instead of solving maths problems. When it comes to writing, I enjoy creating new things in my head, because fulfilling my creations is much harder.

II. The portrait of an everyday creator.

Who am I? Who am I going to be?

The field of the author's interests concerned the personality conditions of the examined people. The most important thing was obtaining information about the person's personal features, perception of herself and expressing herself in front of other people. This is how Dominika perceives herself:

I can say without a doubt that I am really an original person. My interests are really unusual. I have my own beliefs. I am in my own subculture and I will stick to it. I am a self – taught person, I have always wanted to do everything by myself. I am trying to fulfill myself in different aspects.

The general picture of the author and her life is completed with the need for self-fulfillment as well as the need to be independent. Those needs are proved in the statement below:

I am self – sufficient. I am trying to fulfill myself in different aspects and this process is very important for me. I am going straight and forward and I am not looking for the advice of such people like fortune – tellers.

Forming one's personality is strictly connected with defining one's own identity and the need for reflection. Constant development of new skills and interests affects the creation of the true 'self'.

I love searching for new information about the world, life. I am some kind of 'treasury' of ideas, the only problem is that I have no time and possibilities to realize them.

In the story presented by the author, she clearly emphasizes that she is going to devote her future adult life to fulfilling her current passions.

I cannot imagine that in a year or ever I will sit down and say: I will not draw anymore. I want to draw more and better. I cannot imagine giving up writing.

III. Stimuli and inhibitors of daily creativity

What lends you wings and what clips your wings?

The initial and the most important environment in which man creates his/her personality is the family environment that constitutes the area of specific educational influences. They can be treated as positive or negative stimuli for educational results (Łączyk, 1009). Peer group is not less important. In this aspect, conditions favourable and unfavourable for daily activity (i.e., conditions in which creative activity takes place), were taken into account. Does this process take place at home, at school or other areas of life of the examined person? The narrative relation towards herself determined the attitude towards creativity and defined her place in life environment.

The role of the family, environment and support proved to be important for the subject, but simultaneously there appeared both a need for emphasizing her individuality and difficulties in relationships with her peers.

I usually create things at home, alone. I don't like working in a group and I'm rarely interested in what happens inside of the group. People don't like me, maybe because of who I am and because of the fact that I always tell the truth.

It was considered vital to recognize the qualities of the subject's individual life environment, which can have a stimulating or hindering effect on taking up creative activities. The narrator emphasises the role of motivation in everyday life.

When I can't do something, I ask someone for help. I motivate myself to work, because I want to be the best for my own satisfaction, although I'm inspired by my boyfriend and people who are perfect at things I'm interested in. The tiredness caused by learning discourages me sometimes. But it happens rather rarely.

The results of the illness which she went through in her childhood are still making themselves felt, though they do not discourage the narrator – she has her own idea for life and she is realizing it effectively. She does not always have support of the environment of her peers.

I have always had high aspirations. I concentrate on positive things in my life. I try not to feel sorry for myself and take the bull by the horns. I depend greatly on myself. I don't care what my peers say, if I respect someone I respect also his/ her opinion.

The narrator refers in her story to persons who played and still play a great role in her self-education, and development of her creative activities.

Terry Pratchett, Frank Herbert, they inspire me unbelievably. And from my close friends my boyfriend – because he's a genius. And also my key pal, Ana.

IV. The product of everyday creativity

When I'm sad, I'm invisible

The narrator's everyday creativity includes a broad range of activities – starting with artistic expression and ending with the way of perceiving the world.

I'm always cheerful, although I have experienced a lot of pain in my life. I think to myself –the others want to see me happy although there's another operation ahead of me. I try to be creative in everyday life, I try to change myself for the better, my behavior and people who are next to me. I have a lot of zeal for these changes and I'm very persistent.

The realisation of everyday creativity in the subject's life is solely connected with inner life and it manifests itself in many-sidedness of searching and multidirectional development.

What I do is my whole life. Of course, school and learning are also important, but they don't gain control over me. I want to be better at what I do, I want to gain mastery, publish a book in several years' time, study at the Jagiellonian University.

Conclusion

The analysis of the narrator's biography revealed the diversity of her creative activity. A great need for independence and self-realization was noticed, which can indicate that she has an influence on her own life. A complexity of needs has also occurred together with the diversity of her creative research.

The attitude of the examined girl towards herself was undoubtedly a factor influencing her attitude to everyday creativity as well as building relations with her family and peer group. Support of other people proved meaningful and stimulating to her. She emphasized the role the important people play in her life – artists who inspire her, her intimates, teachers – they all make up for a motivating force and inspiration.

The author conducting the research (even though its character was only pilot and it involved only a small sample group of high school students) unquestionably shows a need to deepen the knowledge of everyday creativity, especially in the context of this phenomenon in the school and domestic environment. The author also presents an opinion that more thorough research on the characteristic may be a next challenge on the research path.

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